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JAEGER RECOGNIZES PASSAGE OF ELECTION REFORM LEGISLATION BY CONGRESS

Bismarck, ND - North Dakota Secretary of State Al Jaeger recognized Congress for its work in bringing together consensus and approving comprehensive election reform legislation that has been examined and debated for almost two years.

Jaeger's comments follow passage of far-reaching election reform legislation in Congress that has been described as the most sweeping change to our nation's election laws since passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Known as the Help America Vote Act of 2002, both houses of Congress passed the bi-partisan legislation with overwhelmingly favorable votes. The bill now goes to President Bush who has indicated that he plans to sign it.

The legislation came in response to extensive problems that were uncovered during Florida's 2000 presidential election. Acknowledging that North Dakota has had a very positive track record in conducting elections over the years, Jaeger says the new election rules, which will make for significant changes to the way elections are conducted in North Dakota, should be good for North Dakota voters.

"I am pleased that Congress was able to resolve the arguments that were holding up election reform and approve legislation before recessing this fall," said Jaeger. "More importantly, with the passage of election reform, states can now move forward with preparing legislation and developing plans for implementation in time for consideration and review by their legislative assemblies who will begin meeting after the first of the year."

The comprehensive legislation sets out a multitude of changes and requirements intended to improve voting systems and procedures and the way elections are conducted. One of the bill's provisions would require every voting precinct in the country to be equipped with a voting device allowing voters to correct their ballots for errors like over voting, under voting, and cross party voting. These voting devices would also be required to provide unassisted access to the voting process for persons having broad and diverse disabilities.

Other provisions of the bill include the establishment of a new federal agency to oversee election administration; requiring states to implement a specific provisional voting process ensuring voters are not turned away at the polls for lack of appearing on voter lists; and setting voluntary standards for voting equipment.

The legislation also requires states to develop a state plan, with input from the public, to outline and demonstrate how the state intends to comply with the new election provisions. Jaeger will be drafting legislation for the upcoming 2003 legislative session to put North Dakota in compliance with the new election provisions. With North Dakota's legislative assembly convening in January, the bill's passage at this time is particularly important for his office.

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However, Jaeger is also concerned.

"In order for election reform to be fully implemented as envisioned by the original sponsors of the federal legislation and the various interest groups that were involved in its creation, adequate funding must be appropriated," said Jaeger.

According to Jaeger, although the bill authorized a minimum of five million dollars for each state, the funding will not be available until Congress appropriates it.

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